No. 41 SEPT. '92

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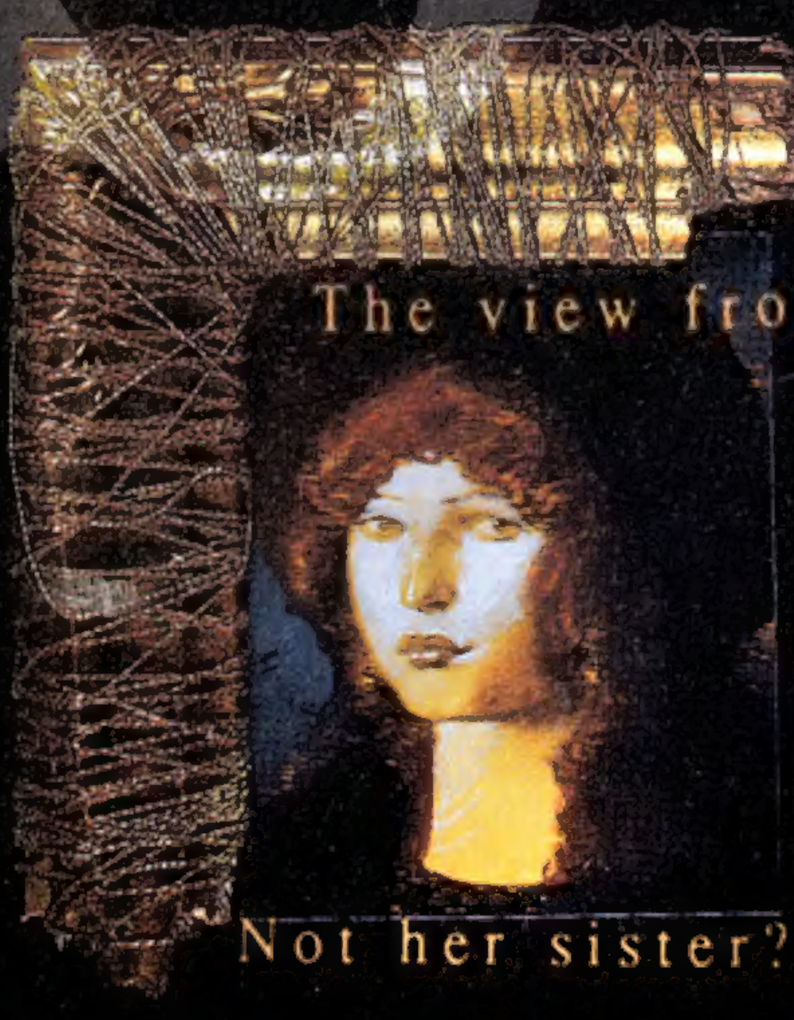

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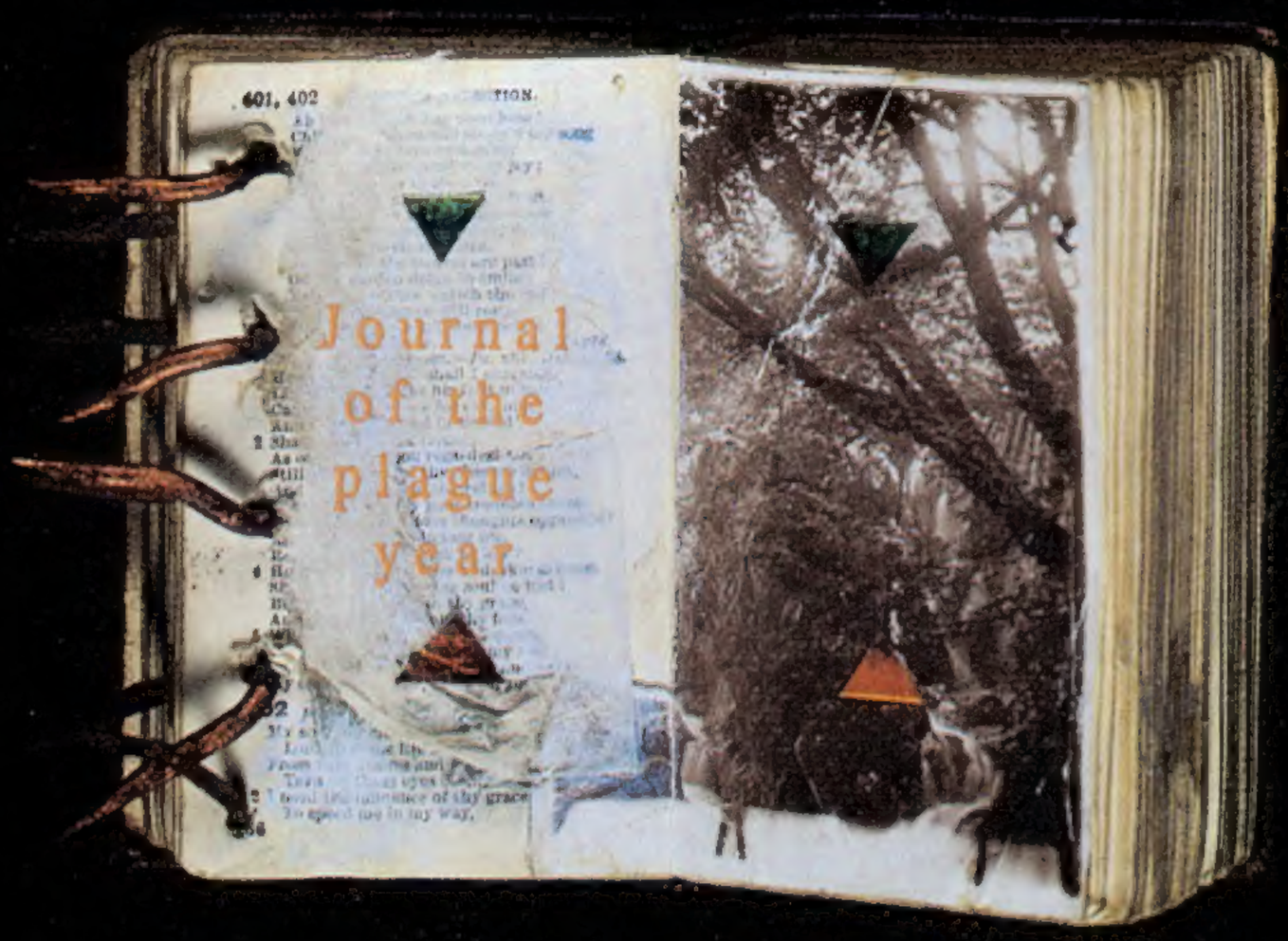

Rain in the doorway

"The number you have dialed..."

and

VINCE LOCKE

IT IS, OF COURSE, A MIRACLE.

ANDROS CAN NEVER GET OVER THE HONOR DAILY DONE TO HIM AND TO HIS FAMILY. THEIR PRIVILEGE AND THEIR BURDEN, AS CUSTODIANS, GUARDS, AND PRIESTS.

AS WITNESSES TO THE MIRACLE.

HE IS THE OLDEST, NOW. THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

EACH MORNING, AT DAWN, HE CLAMBERS AWKWARDLY UP THE CONCEALED STEPS CARVED INTO THE ROCK-FACE OF THE HILL.

EACH STONE STEP CURVES DEEPLY IN THE MIDDLE, ERODED BY HIS BOOTS, AND BY THE BOOTS OF HIS ANCESTORS ...

AT THE TOP OF THE HILL HE PAUSES TO CATCH HIS BREATH. HE'S GETTING OLD.

LADY
HANNA
CONSTANTINE
born 1760
died 1859
"Be to her Virtues
very Kind.
Be to her faults a
little Blind."

THERE.

EVERY SPRING DAY FOR OVER SIXTY YEARS HE HAS PICKED A BLOSSOM FROM THE CHERRY TREE; EVERY SPRING DAY HE HAS PLACED IT ON THE LADY'S GRAVE, AS HIS FATHER AND HIS GRANDFATHER DID BEFORE HIM.

KRIS IS HIS SON-IN-LAW. TWENTY YEARS AGO HE CAME TO THE ISLAND, FLEEING A WAR IN A FAR LAND, DRIVEN BY DARK DREAMS.

ANDROS'S FAMILY TOOK HIM IN: THEY HAD BEEN EXPECTING HIM.

HELLO, PAPA.

HOW WAS HE TONIGHT?

HE SLEPT FOR A FEW HOURS. THEN HE WANTED TO LOOK AT THE MOON. THEN HE WAS SILENT. NOW, HE SLEEPS ONCE MORE.

HM. TELL YOUR HALF-WIT OF A SON THAT I SAW HIM, WHEN I WAS COMING UP THE PATH. ***BEAT*** HIM FOR ME.

HE'S TOO ***OLD*** FOR A BEATING, ANDROS.

HE SHOULD NOT BE SEEN, WHEN HE IS ON GUARD.

BEAT HIM, AND AS YOU DO, TELL HIM THAT WHEN THEY STOLE OUR CHARGE, TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, IT WAS ***THIRTY*** YEARS BEFORE HE RETURNED TO US.

THIRTY ***YEARS.***

IT WILL ***NEVER*** HAPPEN AGAIN.

HE ***KNOWS*** THAT, PAPA.

IF HE ***TRULY*** KNEW THAT THEN HE WOULD NOT HAVE LET HIMSELF BE ***SEEN.***

GO DOWN AND EAT, KRIS. GO SLEEP. I WILL SEE YOU AT DUSK.

GOOD MORNING, ANDROS.

AND TO YOU, LORD. KRIS THOUGHT YOU WERE ASLEEP.

NO. MERELY THINKING. DID YOU PUT THE FLOWER ON HER GRAVE?

OF COURSE.

SHE WAS A REMARKABLE WOMAN.

ALL WOMEN ARE REMARKABLE.

THE EAST WINDOW, I THINK. I WANT TO SEE THE SUN RISE.

HE STARES UNBLINKING INTO THE LIGHT.

THEN HE BEGINS TO SING TO HIMSELF, HIS VOICE LITTLE MORE THAN A WHISPER. HE SINGS TO THE SUNRISE, IN A LONG-FORGOTTEN TONGUE.

ANDROS LISTENS TO THE SONG OF ORPHEUS, AND THE ACHE IN HIS JOINTS EASES; THE COLD LEAVES HIS FINGERTIPS.

THIS IS WHAT MAKES HIM GET UP IN THE DARKNESS, SUMMER OR WINTER, RAIN OR MIST...

THE SONG. IN HIS SOUL HE FEELS YOUNG AGAIN.

FROM THE EAST WINDOW ONE CAN LOOK ACROSS THE BAY.

THERE IS A HOUSE, ON THE HILL ACROSS THE BAY, AND OCCASIONALLY ANDROS (WHOSE EYES HAVE LOST NONE OF THEIR KEENNESS, IN THEIR SEVENTY YEARS ON THIS EARTH) SPIES TINY FIGURES THERE. TOURISTS, PERHAPS, OR VISITORS TO THE ISLAND.

HE WONDERS WHAT THEY SEE, FROM THEIR VILLA.

A LITTLE TEMPLE, ON A CLIFF.

THAT'S ALL. NOTHING SPECIAL.

THE ISLANDS ARE LITTERED WITH THEM. OLD SHRINES TO GODS LONG DEAD.

THE PRIESTS OF ORPHEUS HAVE HAD THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO LEARN THE ART OF MISDIRECTION.

EVEN THE MOST INQUISITIVE TOURIST WOULD FIND IT ALMOST PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND HIS WAY TO THE TEMPLE.

AND IF IT CAME TO MORE THAN THAT..?

WELL, THE CUSTODIANS HAVE NOT BEEN IDLE.

KRIS HAS DRAWN UP PLANS THAT COVER ALMOST ALL EVENTUALITIES -- UP TO AND INCLUDING A HELICOPTER ASSAULT ON THE TEMPLE...

THIRTY YEARS. IT SHALL NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.

"THERE. ENOUGH."

PLEASE, CHRESTOS, CARRY ME INTO THE GARDEN.

I'M ANDROS, LORD.

DID I SAY *CHRE...?* I'M *SORRY.* I WAS THINKING OF YOUR *FATHER.*

NO, THINKS ANDROS RHODOCANAKIS. *YOU WERE THINKING OF MY GRANDFATHER.*

BUT HE SAYS NOTHING.

IT IS GOING TO BE A BEAUTIFUL DAY.

BLOSSOM FOR A LADY—RAIN IN THE DOORWAY—NOT HER SISTER—WANT/NOT WANT—THE VIEW FROM THE BACKS OF MIRRORS—JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR—"THE NUMBER YOU HAVE DIALED..."

Written by Neil Gaiman; Pencilled by Jill Thompson; Inked by Vince Locke; Colored by Danny Vozzo; lettered by Todd Klein; Assisted by Lisa Aufenanger; Edited by Karen Berger.

GOT ANY SPARE CHANGE, LUVVY? I NEED ANOTHER 50p TO PUT PETROL IN ME ROLLS ROYCE. HEE.

YEAH. HOLD ON.

SANDMAN

featuring characters created by Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg

HERE YOU GO. NOT A NICE NIGHT TO BE OUT.

NO. AT LEAST IT'S WARMING UP A BIT, THOUGH. THE WINTER WAS SOMETHING CRUEL.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FRIEND?

HER? SHE'S ASLEEP. I THINK. SHE WAS HERE WHEN I GOT HERE.

IT'S A SHAME, WHEN IT'S THE KIDS. I FIGURE, US OLD FOLKS, WELL, WE'VE HAD A GOOD INNINGS.

BUT KIDS. TCH.

I HAD A SON ONCE, DEAR, BUT HE'S NO LONGER WITH US. WELL, THEY SAID IT WAS A HINDUSTRIAL HACCIDENT, BUT I KNEW WHAT WAS WHAT, OH YES. I WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY.

IT'S NOT FAIR, WHEN THE YOUNG ONES DIE BEFORE THE OLD ONES. I MEAN, THEY'RE ALL WE'VE GOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

THIS END

THE END

YEAH. WELL. GOOD LUCK.

IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN LUCK TO HELP **ME**, DEARIO. YOU'VE A GOOD HEART.

THERE, NOW, LOVE. THAT WAS ONE THER NICE ONES.

THIRTY PEE AND A BIT OF A NATTER, AND **I** DUNNO, SOMETIMES I THINK A KIND WORD'S BETTER THAN THE RHINO...

YOU SHOULD MOVE **UP** A BIT THERE, LOVE. YOU'LL GET POSITIVELY **SOAKED**.

I'VE BEEN. WET. BEFORE. I THINK.

OH. YOU'RE AWAKE. FEELING BETTER?

I FEEL LIKE... I DON'T KNOW. SOMEPLACE NOBODY EVER **GOES** ANY MORE.

I DON'T KNOW.

SPARE CHANGE?

AREN'T YOU **COLD**, DRESSED LIKE THAT? AND **LOOK** AT YOU. HOW OLD ARE YOU **REALLY**? RUN AWAY FROM HOME, HAVE YOU?

YOU SHOULD GO BACK TO YOUR MUM AND DAD, LOVE. I MEAN, THEY'LL FORGIVE AND FORGET. PARENTS **DO**. I WOULD'VE FORGIVEN MY STEVEN.

HINDUSTRIAL HACCIDENT MY AUNT FANNY.

I HAVEN'T GOT **ANY** PARENTS. THERE WAS A BIG FLOOD ONCE AND I GOT **REALLY** WET IN **THAT**, ONLY IT WASN'T RAIN, IT WAS THE GUNKY STUFF INSIDE PEOPLE'S. EYES.

I WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHAT IT'S CALLED...

YOU LOST **BOTH** PARENTS? **TSK**. POOR DEAR.

I DIDN'T **LOSE** MY PARENTS.

I LOST MY **BROTHER**...

WHAT A **SHAME**. MY **STEVEN** DIED. THEY SAID IT WAS A HACCIDENT. BUT **I'VE** GOT PAPERS. **OH** YES. **I** WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY.

SO, LUVVY. HOW DID YOUR BROTHER DIE?

HE'S NOT DEAD. I JUST LOST HIM, OKAY?

WELL, PARDON ME FOR BREATHING.

SPARE A LITTLE CHANGE, LOVE?

THANKS.

CHANGE.

THAT WAS ALWAYS KIND OF THE PROBLEM, KIND OF...

UM SOME DAYS I FEEL LIKE RITA MARLOWE IN THE WAYWARD BUS. YOU EVER SEE THAT MOVIE?

CHANGE. CHANGE. CHANGE. CHANGE... CHANGE. CHANGE. CHAAAANGE.

WHEN YOU SAY WORDS A LOT THEY DON'T MEAN ANYTHING. OR MAYBE THEY DON'T MEAN ANYTHING ANYWAY, AND WE JUST THINK THEY DO.

WHERE YOU GOIN'?

I NEED A CHANGE...

AND WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?

INSIDE. IT'S RAINING OUT HERE. BUT NOT THE JELLY STUFF IN PEOPLE'S EYES.

PRIVATE PARTY. INVITATION ONLY. STRICT DRESS CODE. GO FIND A WAREHOUSE BASH, EH, KID?

CLEAR OFF.

UM. I'VE GOT AN INVITATION. AND I'M DRESSED PROPERLY. AREN'T I?

OH. YEAH. SORRY. GO ON IN, LOVE.

PARDON?

AQUEOUS SOMETHING. OR VITREOUS.

IT'S THE NAME OF WHAT I CAN'T REMEMBER. IN PEOPLE'S EYES.

pervy→

Viv!

Going down?

Love

Stop De

public Prope

♪ ALL the WORLD Just stopped NOW, So you say YOU DON't WANNA STAY to GETHER ANYMORE, let ME take A deep breATh bABe... ♪

...WHEN I TOLD HIM THE NEWS ABOUT FREDDIE HE SAID, "OH. ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST." I SAID, DAHLING, WHEN GOD PUT TEETH IN YOUR MOUTH, HE RUINED A PERFECTLY GOOD ARSEHOLE...

GOD, WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE TO LOOK LIKE HER. LOOKS LIKE BUTTER WOULDN'T MELT BETWEEN HER LEGS...

I DIDN'T LOSE HIM. I MEAN, IT WASN'T ME. I WANTED HIM TO STAY, I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D GO. I ASKED HIM. NOT TO.

IT WASN'T ME. HONESTLY.

...MAYBE SHE'S JUST PIECES OF ME YOU'VE NEVER SEEN...

AND I THINK. AND I THINK. AND I THINK. AND I...

I DON'T. FEEL VERY WELL.

I WANT MY FAMILY BACK. I WANT MY...

YOU?

MY HANDS CUTTING UP EVERY TIME I TOUCH YOU

YOU CAME TO SEE ME. I'M SORRY. I SORT OF GOT MY HEAD A BIT TANGLED. UM.

SHALL WE GO BACK TO YOUR PLACE?

YOU'RE A BIT AHEAD OF YOURSELF, AREN'T YOU? BIT TOO GRUBBY FOR ME BUT I DUNNO. BUY ME A DRINK AND WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT.

I'M LISA. WHO'RE YOU?

I... I'M SOMEBODY ELSE. THE WRONG PERSON.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY SISTER.

I WANT HER.

I WANT MY SISTER.

I WANT MY SISTER.

I WANT MY SISTER!

ER.., ARE YOU ALL *RIGHT*, LOVE?

CHRIST. WHERE *DO* THEY DIG THEM UP FROM?

DO YOU WANT SOME FRESH *AIR*? OR SOME *WATER*?

I THINK SHE'S ILL...

E'D OUT OF HER LITTLE BONCE, I EXPECT. OR WHATEVER THEY'RE DOING NOWADAYS. CHRIST. IT'S PATHETIC.

DO YOU WANT ME TO GET A DOCTOR, LOVE?

KIDS. NO RESPECT FOR THE SCENE. *SOME* PEOPLE JUST BLITHELY RUIN IT FOR EVERY-ONE.

SHE'S FINE. I'LL TAKE CARE OF HER.

OH YEAH? AND WHO ARE YOU?

WELL...

SOMETIMES...

I'M HER SISTER.

HONESTLY, GIRL. SHE'S *RIGHT:* YOU *ARE* PATHETIC, MAKING A SCENE LIKE THAT. I COULD HEAR YOU SCREAMING TWO CONTINENTS AWAY.

DESIRE?

WHO ELSE?

EXCUSE ME. I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU. UM. I MEAN. YOU'RE *GORGEOUS.* SO. UH. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

NO.

YOU SEE THAT YOUNG LADY IN RED? OVER THERE?

GO AND *TALK* TO HER. HAVE A PASSIONATE WEEKEND DURING WHICH BOTH OF YOU MAKE LOVE UNTIL YOU'RE SORE AND BLEEDING. THEN, WITHOUT KNOWING WHY, REFUSE TO *SEE* HER AGAIN.

SHE'LL PHONE YOU UP, AND HANG AROUND YOUR HOUSE. WHEN YOU ASK HER TO LEAVE YOU ALONE SHE'LL JUST CRY AND NOT *SAY* ANYTHING-- LOOK AT YOU WITH HURT EYES AND FOLLOW YOU AROUND.

EVENTUALLY THIS WILL MAKE YOU SO *ANGRY* YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF NEEDING DESPERATELY TO MAKE HER SAY SOMETHING. TO MAKE HER REACT. TO *HURT* HER. TO GET HER EYES OUT OF YOUR MIND.

AFTER THAT IT WILL BE JUST A MATTER OF *TIME.*

CHK

UH. OKAY...

THANKS. YEAH. *WOW.* THANKS A LOT.

WILL YOU. WILL YOU TAKE ME *AWAY* FROM HERE?

PLEASE?

HOLD MY HAND. WE'LL GO TO MY PLACE.

"I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU THIS BAD IN A WHILE. ROTTEN NIGHT, HUH?"

"I. I'M FINDING IT HARDER TO HOLD ON."

"HOLD ON TO WHAT?"

EVERYTHING. IT ALL KEEPS MOVING AND IT WON'T STOP AND I JUST WANT IT TO STOP AND THEN I WON'T STOP AND THEN I THINK WHAT IF IT GETS WORSE? I MEAN, YOU KNOW?

WHAT IF IT GETS WORSE?

OH COME ON, LITTLE SISTER. PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER.

DELIRIUM? COME ON, SIS...

I'M TOGETHER. AREN'T I? I... I KNOW I USED TO BE.

I DON'T KNOW.

YES. YOU USED TO BE.

DESIRE? I MISS HIM SO BADLY.

HE WAS ALWAYS KIND TO ME.

INDEED.

AND I'M NOT?

...I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT.

DESIRE? DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS?

NOT ONLY DO I NOT *KNOW*, LITTLEST SISTER, BUT I DON'T CARE.

DO YOU THINK IT'S IN THE BIG BOOK?

I MEAN, EVERYTHING'S IN THE BIG BOOK. MAYBE HE'D *SHOW* IT TO US. AND THEN WE COULD ALL BE TOGETHER AGAIN. ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY.

IF OUR PRODIGAL BROTHER *WANTED* US TO FIND HIM I'M SURE HE'D LET US KNOW.

YES...

LOOK--DEL. HE'S NOT *HERE*, OKAY? HE'S NOT ONE OF THE FAMILY ANY MORE. JUST ACCEPT IT.

I WANT HIM BACK!

DROP IT, DEL. JUST *DROP* IT.

HAHAHA HAHA... HAA...HAAAA... HH.

HAHA HAHA HAAA...

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

WELL, YOU.

TELLING ME NOT TO **WANT** SOMETHING. I MEAN, THAT'S ALL YOU **ARE**. **WANTING**. I MEAN, IT'S KIND OF **FUNNY**...

ISN'T IT? ISN'T IT **FUNNY**?

WELL, **ISN'T** IT?

DESIRE? CAN I USE YOUR GALLERY?

HMPH. WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR **OWN** GALLERY?

I **LOST** IT. IT'S SOMEWHERE IN MY OWN REALM. I'M NOT SURE WHERE.

SURE.

OBVIOUSLY SHE DOESN'T WISH TO BE DISTURBED.

TCH.

PLEASE?

SISTER? I'M STANDING IN MY GALLERY, ONLY I'M **NOT** BECAUSE THIS IS DESIRE'S BUT CAN I COME AND SEE YOU? PLEASE?

PLEASE? I'M HOLDING YOUR SIGIL. YOUR RING THINGIE. **REALLY** I AM.

DELIRIUM HAS, FROM TIME TO TIME, VISITED DESPAIR'S GRAY REALM. IT IS THE ANTITHESIS OF HER OWN CHURNING DOMAIN: FORMLESS AND SILENT AND STILL. APATHY HANGS LIKE DAMP MIST IN THE CHILL AIR.

NO WINDS BLOW, NO BIRD SINGS, NOTHING MOVES.

SHE FEELS THE COLD TOUCHING HER, SOBERING HER. COOL TENDRILS MOVE INSIDE HER, QUESTING, WHISPERING...

SHE STARES AT THE WORLD WITH TWO MISMATCHED EYES: ONE EMERALD GREEN, THE OTHER PALE BLUE THROUGH WHICH SILVER FLECKS FLICKER AND SWIM LIKE A SHOAL OF TINY FISH.

DELIRIUM SEES THE GRAY PLACE THAT WAITS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF EVERY MIRROR.

AND SHE SHIVERS.

LIM. HELLO.

SHHH... WAIT...

SO. ER. WHO IS HE?

HE MANAGES A SUPERMARKET IN A SMALL TOWN IN NEBRASKA.

YESTERDAY HIS WIFE FOUND A COLLECTION OF PORNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHS HIDDEN IN THEIR GARAGE.

MOST OF THEM SHOWED SMALL CHILDREN PERFORMING VARIOUS SEXUAL ACTS WITH ADULTS.

SHE RECOGNIZED HER HUSBAND, AND THEIR FIVE-YEAR-OLD NIECE.

SHE LEFT HIM, TAKING THE PHOTOGRAPHS WITH HER. HE FEARS SHE MAY ALREADY HAVE GIVEN THEM TO THE POLICE.

TODAY HE'S SITTING IN THEIR FAMILY ROOM, REALIZING THAT HIS LIFE IS OVER, WONDERING IF HE HAS THE COURAGE PHYSICALLY TO END IT.

HE DOESN'T.

ISN'T IT *BEAUTIFUL?*

IT'S OKAY. I SUPPOSE. IF YOU'RE INTO THAT KIND OF THING.

LISTEN. I UM SORT OF HAVE TO TALK TO YOU.

AH? SO TALK.

IT'S ABOUT, UM, OUR FAMILY.

WHAT *ABOUT* IT?

I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT MAYBE I OUGHT TO HAVE A PET. I MEAN, YOU'VE GOT YOUR RATS AND OUR SISTER'S GOT HER GOLDFISH AND I MEAN EVEN STUFFY DREAM'S GOT THAT BIG BLACK BIRD.

AND DESTINY'S GOT THE LITTLE FLAPPY THINGS...

I DON'T KNOW. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT *ABOUT* OUR FAMILY?

OH YEAH. I THINK MAYBE SOMEBODY SHOULD *DO* SOMETHING. THAT'S ALL.

ABOUT WHAT, DELIRIUM?

DIDN'T I SAY?

NO.

OH. I THOUGHT MAYBE I DID.

LOOK, DESPAIR, DO YOU REMEMBER... UM...

I MEAN, *DO* YOU REMEMBER...

REMEMBER *WHAT?*

THE NAME OF THE GUNKY JELLY STUFF IN PEOPLE'S EYES?

VITREOUS HUMOR.

OH YEAH. I KNEW THAT. THANKS. WELL... HANG IN THERE. I MEAN, I'LL SEE YOU. B'BYE.

DELIRIUM? IS THAT ALL YOU WANTED TO KNOW? THE NAME OF THE JELLY IN PEOPLE'S EYES?

NOT REALLY. THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. YOU PROMISE YOU WON'T BE MAD IF I TELL YOU?

I DON'T GET MAD.

OKAY, THEN, YOU HAVE TO PROMISE IF I SAY SOMETHING YOU DON'T LIKE YOU WON'T DO THAT VOICE THAT SOUNDS LIKE PEOPLE WITH WET AND BUBBLY STUFF IN THEIR LUNGS BURIED UNDER THE GROUND BEING CRUSHED TO DEATH BY GIANT WORMS TALKING.

HHHH...I PROMISE.

OUR BROTHER. I THINK WE SHOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM.

WHY?

HE MIGHT BE. HURT. HE MIGHT NEED US.

SO?

I MISS HIM.

SO?

WILL YOU HELP ME FIND HIM?

DO YOU HONESTLY THINK HE *WANTS* TO BE FOUND?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT I WANT TO FIND HIM. I JUST THOUGHT YOU COULD MAYBE. HELP ME.

IF I SAY NO, WHAT WILL YOU DO THEN?

ASK THE REST OF THE FAMILY. I SUPPOSE. DESIRE SAID NO ALREADY. SO I THOUGHT, OKAY, I'D ASK YOU NEXT. IT'S JUST ALL BEEN DIFFERENT SINCE HE WENT. IT'S SOUR AND ROTTEN AND I'M LONELY. WE NEVER SEE EACH OTHER. HE MADE THINGS OKAY.

NO. I WON'T HELP YOU.

OH.

WELL, THANK YOU FOR NOT DOING THE VOICE, ANYWAY.

SO WHO WILL YOU ASK NOW?

ARE YOU SURE YOU WON'T CHANGE YOUR MIND? I MEAN, DREAM'S MUCH SPOOKIER THAN YOU ARE. AND I'M ALWAYS SCARED HE'S LAUGHING AT ME, BEHIND HIS FACE.

UM. DREAM, I SUPPOSE. HE'S THE NEXT OLDEST, AFTER...

HE'LL SAY NO. YOU KNOW THAT?

I HAVE MY OWN RESPONSIBILITIES. AND I RESPECT OUR BROTHER'S PRIVACY.

AND YOU DON'T WANT TO UPSET DESIRE, DO YOU?

PLEASE. DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT. I. UM. I...

I'M GOING BACK TO MY OWN HOME. I'M GOING TO THINK.

THREE BLIND HUMMINGBIRDS HANG IN THE AIR LIKE JEWELS OF IRIDESCENT SCARLET AND COBALT; THEN, ONE BY ONE, THEY FADE, ALL COLOR LEECHED FROM THEM, AND FALL LIFELESS INTO THE MISTS, TO BE EATEN BY THE RATS.

DESPAIR FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE.

IN HER WORLD THERE ARE SO MANY WINDOWS. EACH OPENING SHOWS HER AN EXISTENCE THAT'S FALLEN TO HER--SOME ONLY FOR MOMENTS, OTHERS FOR LIFETIMES.

ABLE AT THIS MOMENT NEITHER TO SAVOR THEM, NOR TO UNDERSTAND HER OWN DISQUIET, SHE STARES AWAY FROM ALL WINDOWS AS SHE WALKS.

SILENT RATS RUN UNMINDFULLY OVER HER FEET, INVISIBLE IN THE MIST.

SHE MISSES HIM.

IT IS OVER THREE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE LAST SHE AND HER BROTHER WERE ALONE TOGETHER...

LIKE A FLOOD, THE MEMORIES COME, AND SHE IS DROWNING IN THEM.

AGAINST HER WILL HER CHEST HEAVES, AND SHE BEGINS TO WEEP: DEEP, HELPLESS, RACKING SOBS...

NO.

DESPAIR PLACES THE COLD METAL BARB OF HER HOOK ONTO THE SURFACE OF HER EYE. AND THEN SHE PUSHES (PIERCING CORNEA AND LENS) AND RIPS (FREEING THE AQUEOUS HUMOR AND VITREOUS HUMOR TO RUN LIKE TEARS DOWN HER CHEEK, INTO HER HAND)...

THE PAIN DISTRACTS HER, A LITTLE.

BUT STILL, SHE REMEMBERS...

THE CITY FOLK HAD KILLED THE CATS AND THE DOGS BECAUSE THEY MIGHT HAVE HELPED SPREAD THE DISEASE; AND IF THEY COULD, THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED EACHOTHER.

Lord Have mercy upon us..

LACKING THAT POWER, THEY IMPRISONED EACH OTHER IN THEIR HOUSES ON THE FIRST SUSPICION OF DISEASE. A ROUGH RED CROSS WAS PAINTED ON THE DOOR: WRITTEN ON A PAPER THE WORDS "LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US".

THE DOOR WAS THEN SEALED, AND A WATCHMAN PLACED OUTSIDE, UNTIL ALL THEREIN HAD BEEN UNTOUCHED BY THE DISEASE FOR FORTY DAYS, OR WERE DEAD.

SHE HEARD THE SCREAMS OF TWO CHILDREN IN A HIGH ATTIC ROOM, THEIR PARENTS LONG DEAD. A NEWBORN BABY SUCKLED THE MILK AND THE PLAGUE FROM A COLD BREAST...

DESPAIR WALKED THE STREETS OF LONDON IN 1665, THE PLAGUE YEAR.

ON THE EMPTY STREET, A CORPSE LAY, WAITING FOR THE CART TO TAKE IT TO THE PLAGUE PIT; NEXT TO IT LAY A POOR PIPER, UNTOUCHED BY DISEASE, BUT DEAD DRUNK.

HE WOULD COME TO HIS SENSES IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE FOLLOWING MORNING, IN THE PLAGUE PIT, WITH SOFT EARTH ON HIS FACE, AND COLD FLESH BENEATH HIM, AND BELIEVE HIMSELF IN HELL...

"LET ME OBSERVE HERE," SAID DEFOE, WRITING SOMEWHAT AFTER THE EVENT, "THAT WHEN I SAY THE PEOPLE ABANDONED THEMSELVES TO DESPAIR, I DO NOT MEAN TO RELIGIOUS DESPAIR, OR A DESPAIR OF THEIR ETERNAL STATE; BUT I MEAN A DESPAIR OF THEIR BEING ABLE TO ESCAPE THE INFECTION, OR TO OUTLIVE THE PLAGUE...

"THE PEOPLE WERE BROUGHT INTO A CONDITION TO DESPAIR OF LIFE."

WHEN DESPAIR READ THAT, THROUGH A MIRROR, SHE NODDED WITH THE SATISFACTION OF ONE WHO HAD PERFORMED HER DUTY WITH DILIGENCE AND CARE.

WELL-MET, SISTER. LONG IT IS, SINCE LAST I SAW *YOU* AWAY FROM YOUR DOMAIN.

TRUE. SOMETIMES REFLECTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH. AND *YOU?* SHOULD YOU NOT BE IN *YOUR* KINGDOM?

I GET LITTLE CHANCE FOR THAT IN *THESE* DAYS. I WALK THIS WORLD MORE AND MORE...

THE WHEEL NEVER CEASES FROM TURNING.

STILL-- *HAH HAH HAH!*-- I HAVE NOTHING TO COMPLAIN OF, DO I?

I NEVER COMPLAIN.

NO.

SO, MY SISTER. THIS IS A GOOD TIME FOR YOU.

YES.

ARE YOU *PLEASED?*

PLEASED, OH MY LORD OF DESTRUCTION? I AM NEITHER PLEASED NOR DISPLEASED.

I SIMPLY AM.

OH.

THIS WON'T LAST FOR MUCH LONGER. ALREADY THE DEATHS ARE GETTING FEWER...

PLAGUES COME AND GO.

YES.

AND THEN IT'S *MY* TURN.

THINGS *ARE* CHANGING, MY SISTER.

THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

OH, BUT THEY *DO*. THAT'S MY PROVINCE, AFTER ALL.

SOME THINGS ARE CHANGELESS.

PEOPLE LOVE, AND DIE, THEY DREAM, DESTROY, DESPAIR, GO MAD. THEY FULFILL THEIR DESTINIES, LIVE OUT THE COURSE OF THEIR LIVES.

WE FULFILL *OUR* FUNCTION, AS *THEY* FULFILL *THEIRS*...

THAT WILL NOT CHANGE.

YOU THINK NOT?

AHHH. AYE WELL, PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT, AFTER ALL.

WE WILL *SEE*.

AH, ME. I HAVE MUCH TO DO, SCANT TIME TO STAND HERE *GABBLING*. FARE YE WELL, MY LITTLE SISTER. 'TIL NEXT I SEE YOUR PRETTY FACE...

HIS BEARD WAS ROUGH AGAINST HER SKIN.

NO ONE EVER KISSED DESPAIR, SAVE HER BROTHER.

BUT WHEN SHE NEXT SAW HIM IT WAS IN DESTINY'S HALL, THIRTY YEARS ON...

FOR THE LAST TIME.

DESPAIR? SWEET TWIN? I, DESIRE, CALL YOU. I STAND IN MY GALLERY AND I HOLD YOUR SIGIL.

WILL YOU TALK TO ME?

DELIRIUM VISITED ME. SHE SEEKS THE PRODIGAL. SHE SEEKS DESTRUCTION.

WHAT DID SHE *SAY* TO YOU? WE *HAVE* TO TALK...

HELLO?

YOU KNOW HOW SHE IS WHEN SHE GETS AN IDEA INTO HER HEAD. I MEAN, WHEN ONE *FINALLY* PENE-TRATES.

I'M... I'M REALLY *WORRIED* ABOUT THIS.

SHE'LL GO *AFTER* HIM. I *KNOW* SHE WILL. AND WHAT IF SHE INVOLVES OUR *ELDERS* IN HER MADNESS?

DESPAIR?

I'M IN MY GALLERY.

I'M HOLDING YOUR SIGIL.

I *KNOW* YOU'RE *THERE*.

TALK TO ME.

WE HAVE TO *STOP* HER.

PLEASE?

SISTER?

TALK TO ME?

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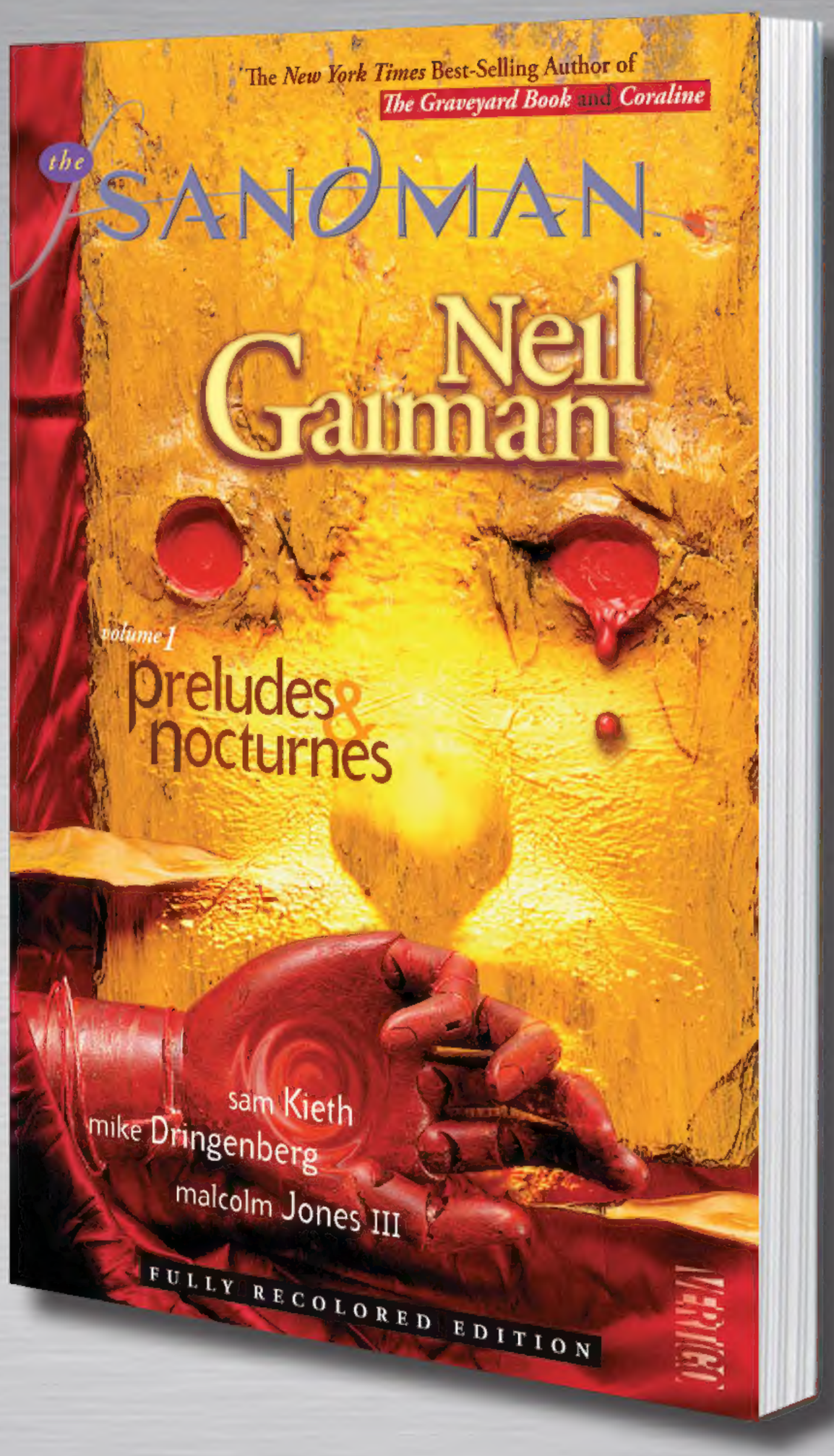

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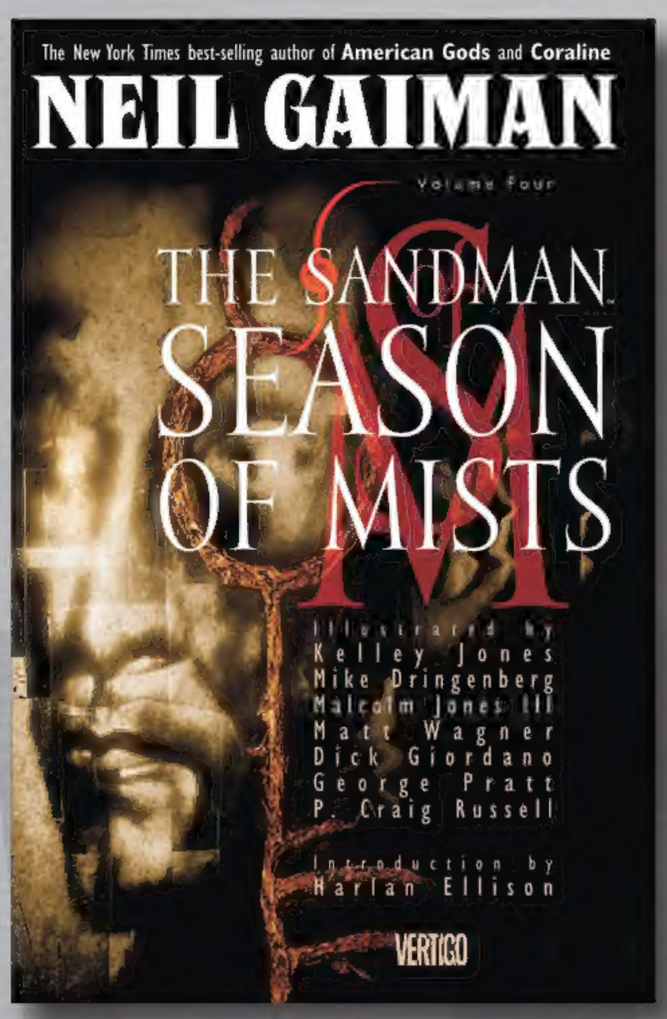

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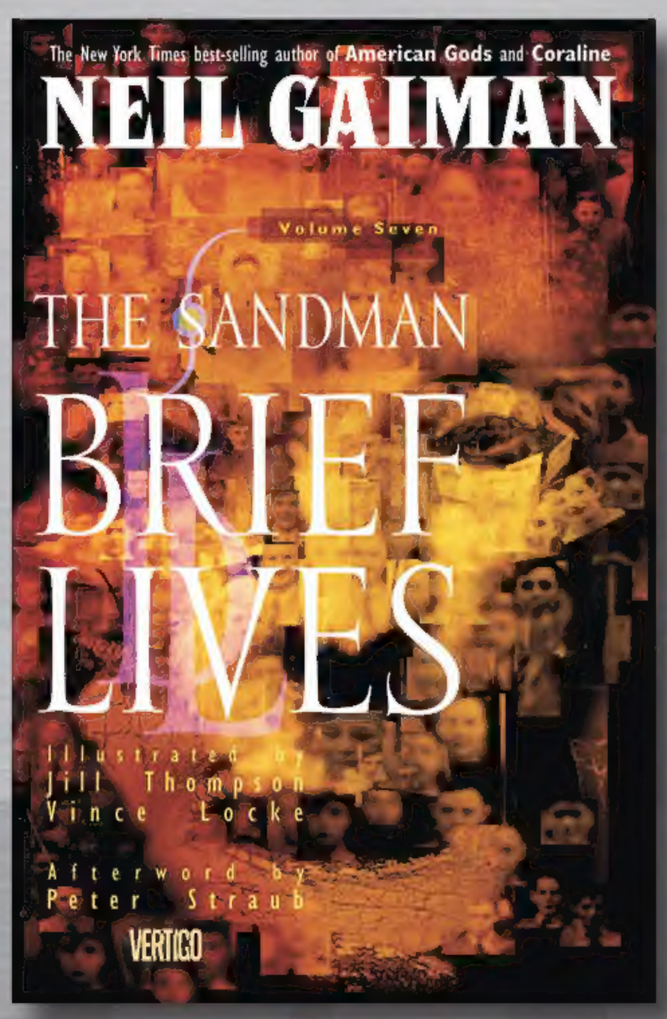

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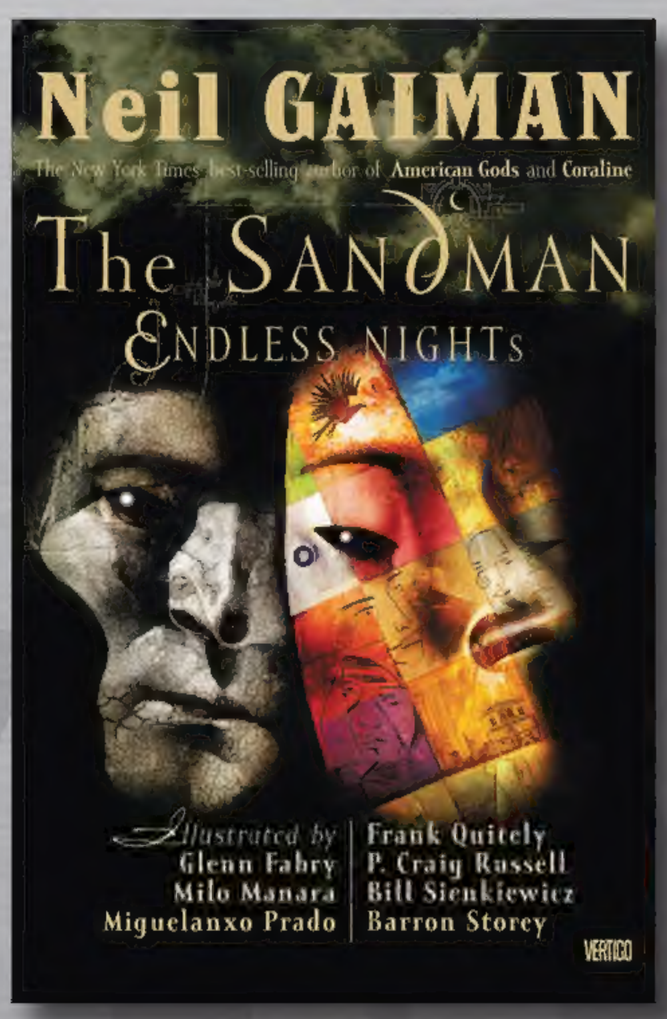

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